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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4522
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY 5527
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5330
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0910
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY 4136
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 5544
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 5126
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 001090

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL AR
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: AGRICULTURAL SECTOR ADVOCATE EXPelled
FROM RULING PARTY

REF: 05 BUENOS AIRES 02303

1) (SBU) Peronist national congresswoman Maria del Carmen Alarcon -- the leading defender of the agricultural sector in the national Congress-- was expelled from the ruling Victory Front (FPV) congressional bloc and asked to resign the presidency of the Agricultural Committee in the Lower House on May 10 by FPV leaders because of her strong criticism of the GOA's agricultural policies. Alarcon also heads the agricultural lobby Grupo Pampa Sur together with ex-Congressman Miguel Saredi (For more on Grupo Pampa Sur, see Reftel). Alarcon is a second-term Lower House member that first entered Congress in 1999 as a protege of former Santa Fe Governor and current National Senator Carlos Reutemann. Casa Rosada pollster Enrique Zuleta Puceiro told Poloff on May 11 that FPV bloc leader, Agustin Rossi, strongly advocated Alarcon's expulsion to President Kirchner because he views Reutemann and Alarcon as rivals within the Peronist Party (PJ) in Santa Fe.

2) (SBU) The political opposition -- including the Duhaldistas that have remained outside of the FPV, Elisa Carrio's Affirmation for an Egalitarian Republic (ARI) and Republican Proposal (PRO) leader Mauricio Macri -- criticized the action against Alarcon. Senator Hilda "Chiche" Gonzalez de Duhalde attacked the ruling party's "authoritarianism" and the National Justice bloc that she is a part of expressed strong support for Alarcon. Alarcon said she would not resign the Agriculture Committee presidency -- forcing the FPV to vote to remove her -- and would form her own one-person bloc in Congress. (Comment: The FPV leadership will easily be able to garner the necessary votes to remove her from the committee presidency. End Comment.)

3) (SBU) Comment: Maria del Carmen Alarcon has been the leading congressional member in recent years who has championed the rights of the agricultural community. The move against Alarcon is clearly designed to send the message that the Kirchner administration will not tolerate criticism of its controversial agricultural policies from within the ruling party. Alarcon chose to defend the interests of her province and that of her voters rather than give her unwavering support for the GOA's policies. Alarcon's punishment is yet another example of President Kirchner's control over his supporters in the Argentine Congress. As Kirchner continues to exert greater control over his congressional bloc through actions like this, he in the process weakens the independence and power of the Argentine Congress. End Comment.

GUTIERREZ